

UST 634/734 (DRAFT SYLLABUS)

Ethics in the Public Sector

Monday 6:00 – 9:30 pm

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Office hours: Monday & Tuesday 4:00 – 6:00

or by appointment

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“To be good and virtuous is a noble thing, but to teach others to be good and virtuous is nobler still—and much, much easier.”

Mark Twain

Introduction

The purpose of this course is to provide an opportunity for you to reflect on the ethical dimensions of public and nonprofit management. Since there are few if any dimensions of public and nonprofit management that do not have ethical issues inherent in them, or so this course will suggest, the opportunities for reflection will be almost unlimited.

Unlike some other aspects of professional education for public/nonprofit service, the study of ethics will involve you in thinking about ambiguous questions that by their nature do not have one best answer that everyone can agree on. In contrast to learning how to do statistical tests or how to prepare a performance budget, ethics provides few anchors that will reassure you that you are ‘doing the right thing.’ Many people come to an ethics class expecting that it will provide them with an algorithm for ethical decision-making, and in fact, when told that no such algorithm exists, some people refuse to believe it. On the other hand, faced with ethical dilemmas (which occur daily in public and nonprofit management), you need a sense of how to proceed in thinking them through, and this class is intended to help you find your way to an approach that is right for you.

The foundation stone for ethical action is judgment. Developing sound judgment can only be learned through experience and reflection on experience, your own and that of others. This is because there are no hard and fast standards for ‘good’ judgment. Undoubtedly, your life so far has presented you with many tough situations that required you to exercise your judgment. In that sense, this course is only teaching you something you already know. At the same time, real life often does not provide enough opportunities for reflection on decisions you have already made or actions you have already taken. It is hoped that this course will serve as an extended opportunity for sizing up situations or dilemmas, exercising your judgment about the appropriate action to take, and being able to justify (give reasons for) the actions you select. Through discussions, readings, case examples, and exercises, the class aims to offer you opportunities to practice making ethical judgments. Through such practice, you may find yourself less likely to jump to

conclusions in complex situations—or if you do jump to a conclusion, you may be more aware that you are doing just that, and better able to ask yourself whether the conclusion you have jumped to is the right one.

Because the course will not involve you in learning a set of techniques, but rather in practicing a kind of thinking, you may find yourself from time to time feeling confused, cut adrift, or uncomfortable. If you do, rest assured that this is a good sign. Very little real learning or development takes place without some discomfort or confusion. Engaging deeply with the course material will afford many opportunities to clear up confusions and explore questions and issues.

Required course texts:

James H. Jones, Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment

Henrik Ibsen, An Enemy of the People

Guy B. Adams and Danny L. Balfour, Unmasking Administrative Evil

Janet V. Denhardt and Robert B. Denhardt, The New Public Service: Serving, not Steering

Readings (on electronic reserve):

Applebaum, Arthur, “Democratic legitimacy and official discretion” in Ethics for Adversaries: The Morality of Roles in Public and Professional Life

Arendt, Hannah, “Thinking and moral consideration,”

Aristotle, Excerpt from Nicomachean Ethics

Cooper, Terry, Excerpt from The Responsible Administrator

Dewey, John, “The moral self,” The Essential Dewey, Vol. 2, Larry A. Hickman & Thomas M. Alexander (eds.)

Dostoevsky, Fyodor, “The grand inquisitor,” The Brothers Karamazov

Finer, Herman, “Administrative responsibility in democratic government,” Public Administration Review, 1941.

Friedrich, Carl J., “Public policy and the nature of administrative responsibility,” Public Policy, 1940.

Luke, Jeff, “Policy ethics”

Machiavelli, Nicolo, Excerpt from The Prince

McSwain, Cynthia and Orion White, “The case for lying, cheating and stealing,” Administration & Society, 1987

Stivers, Camilla, “Citizenship ethics in public administration” in Handbook of Administrative Ethics, Terry L. Cooper (ed.), 2nd ed., 2000.

Thompson, Dennis F., “The possibility of administrative ethics,” Public Administration Review, 1985

West, Cornel, “Pragmatism and the sense of the tragic” in The Cornel West Reader

Zimmerman, Joseph F., “Ethics in the public service,” State & Local Government Review, 1982

Assignments

Initial reaction paper (3-4 pages, typed double spaced): You will prepare a reaction paper to the first book, Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, in which you address the following questions:

What is the *main* ethical issue reflected in the Tuskegee Experiment, as the author presents it? Pick one prominent person involved in the situation and discuss how that person dealt with the ethical issue. State whether you agree or disagree with how that person acted and the basis for your assessment.

What is the larger significance of this issue for public administration or nonprofit management?

This paper is to be handed in at the beginning of the second class on September 8. No late work will be accepted.

Other reaction papers (3-4 pages, typed double spaced): You will be required to hand in four additional reaction papers during the semester. In each paper you will discuss some issue raised by the reading for a particular class session. If there is more than one reading for a particular night, you should discuss all the readings for that night. The papers will be evaluated based on your demonstrating your understanding of the material for that session and your ability to apply it to a thesis of your choosing. You may select which four class session readings to discuss, but in each case the papers are due the night of the class under discussion. No late work will be accepted.

Case analysis: You will prepare a 7-10 page (typed, double spaced) paper in which you analyze an ethical dilemma related to public-sector or nonprofit ethics. This may be either a dilemma which you have experienced personally or one confronted by someone you know. You may change names and incidental facts to protect the identities of the persons or organizations. Your analysis should follow the model developed by Terry Cooper in The Responsible Administrator (available on electronic reserve and discussed in class). The analysis is due on November 24. No late work will be accepted.

Midterm and Final Exams: There will be a midterm and a final exam. The midterm will be given in class and the final will be a take-home. The exam will consist of several essay questions requiring you to reflect on course material and/or analyze a case situation.

Class Schedule

- 8/25: Introduction to the course, review of the syllabus.
- 9/1: Labor Day Holiday
- 9/8: Discussion of Bad Blood; hand in reaction papers at start of class
- 9/15: The nature of judgment:
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics
Dewey, Moral judgment and knowledge
Arendt, Thinking and moral considerations
- 9/22: The ethics of rules and codes:
Zimmerman, Ethics in the public service
Chandler, The problem of moral reasoning in public administration
- 9/29: The ethics of decision-making:
Ethics of principles
Ethics of consequences
Thompson, The possibility of administrative ethics
- 10/6: The ethics of decision-making, continued:
Professionalism
Ibsen, Enemy of the People
“Sound science goes sour”
- 10/13: Columbus Day Holiday
- 10/20: The ethics of decision-making, continued:
Administrative discretion
Friedrich
Finer
Applebaum, Democratic legitimacy and official discretion
Film: Billy Budd
- 10/27: Mid-term exam
- 11/3: Adams & Balfour, Unmasking Administrative Evil
- 11/10: Ethics of relationship: Individual and organization
Correctional HMOs

11/17: Ethics of relationship, continued: Individual and community
Habermas
Citizenship ethics

11/24: Ethics as a practice of the self
Dewey, The moral self
McSwain and White, The case for lying, cheating and stealing

12/1: Denhardt & Denhardt, The New Public Service

What the instructor expects of you

Come to class regularly and be on time.
Read the material assigned for each class session.
Participate actively in class discussions and other activities.
Do the written assignments and hand them in on time.

Because the entire course is based on active discussions and the exchange of differing viewpoints, its success depends on your willingness to meet the above expectations. If you don't, you will be depriving not only yourself but others of a full learning experience. For that reason, there are penalties attached to not living up to these expectations.

More than one unexcused absence: Grade lowered one point (e.g. from A to A-) for each (the first one is 'free'). Excused absence means letting the instructor know *ahead of time* why you will not be in class. One absence will be excused for life-threatening illnesses (yours or a family member's). One absence due to an unavoidable work commitment can be made up by doing additional written work.

Late written work: Late work will not be read (and therefore credit will be forfeited) except in the case of life-threatening illness. The way to avoid lateness caused by other emergencies is not to wait until the night before to do the assignment.

Class participation: There's more to participation than just showing up. Ask questions. Comment on something someone else just said. Participation does not require brilliance, it requires engagement with the material and with the ongoing discussion. Sitting silent for the whole semester will have a negative effect on your grade, not to mention your learning.